

Message Text

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TO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 096035

EXDIS

FOLLOWING IS REPEAT WELLINGTON 1446 SENT ACTION SECSTATE
INFO CANBERRA MAY 9:

QTE C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 1446

EXDIS

DEPT PASS CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT NZ

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER'S HEALTH AND PROSPECT OF WEAKER GNZ

REF: WELLINGTON 1422

BEGIN SUMMARY: EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENT GNZ CLOSELY
LINKED TO PM'S HEALTH. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER DINNER AT MY RESIDENCE MAY 8 DCM ASKED DEPUTY
LEADER OPPOSITION MULDOON, AN ASTUTE POLITICIAN,
WHETHER HE THOUGH NZ WOULD HAVE A VIABLE GOVERNMENT
STRONG ENOUGH TO COPE WITH CURRENT PROBLEMS BY 1976
(ELECTIONS WILL BE NOVEMBER 1975).

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2. IN REPLY, MULDOON MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. "THERE ARE NO SECRETS IN THE PARLIAMENT."

MP'S BELIEVED PM HAD SUFFERED CORONARY. HE CITED POINTS IN REFTEL AND ADDED: A) KIRK'S ACTIVE MIND DOESNT LET HIM RELAX; B) IT IS BELIEVED KIRK HAS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE; C) MP PETER GORDON, WHO SITS OPPOSITE KIRK IN PARLIAMENT AND SO HAS OBSERVED HIM FOR MANY YEARS, HAS TWO BROTHERS WHO ARE WELL-KNOWN MD'S. HE HAS CITED TO THEM PM'S OVERWEIGHT, AND HIS OBSERVATION THAT UNDER PRESSURE OF DEBATE PM BECOMES VERY EXCITED. KNOWING ALL ABOVE, PLUS EVIDENCE REFTEL, GORDON'S MD BROTHERS BELIEVE HE IS CORONARY PRONE, HAS PROBABLY SUFFERED FROM CORONARY, AND RECUPERATIVE PERIOD WILL BE DRAWN OUT IF HE SURVIVES.

B. KIRK "IS" THE LABOUR PARTY. IF HE WERE NOTICEABLY WEAKER, GNZ WOULD BE ALSO.

C. MULDOON AGREED NATIONAL PARTY HAD LOST SOME OF ITS BEST YOUNG MEN IN 1972 ELECTION. WHILE HE HAD GREAT HOPES THAT SID GOING, A YOUNG ALL BLACK (NZ CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM) RUGBY STAR WHO IS HALF MAORI AND A POPULAR HERO THROUGHOUT NZ, WOULD RUN FOR WHANGEREI SEAT IN 1975 AND THEREBY SWING MANY SMALL TOWN SEATS TO NATIONAL (SMALL TOWN RUGBY FANS STRONGLY OBJECT TO KIRK'S REFUSAL TO LET ALL BLACKS PLAY SOUTH AFRICAN SPRING BOKS--TO THEM THIS IS A NATIONAL ISSUE), HE DID NOT PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE 1975 ELECTION.

3. COMMENTS:

A. PROBABLY GNZ, WHICH NOW BESET WITH SERIOUS PROBLEMS--INFLATION, ENERGY PROBLEM, MANPOWER SHORTAGE IN ALL ECONOMIC SECTORS--WILL HENCEFORTH BE WEAKER SINCE ITS LEADER WILL BE WEAKER.

B. WHILE REPORTING OFFICER IS WELL AWARE THAT 6 MONTHS IS A LONG TIME IN POLITICS, DEVELOPMENTS IN PAST FEW WEEKS INDICATE 1975 ELECTIONS COULD BE CLOSER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT. IF LABOUR WINS, IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT FURTHER WEAKENED BY LOSS OF SEATS. IF CONFIDENTIAL

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NATIONAL WINS, IT WILL PROBABLY BE BY NARROW MAJORITY AND PARTY WILL FACE PROBLEM OF DIVIDED LEADERSHIP BETWEEN MARSHALL AND MULDOON. BOTH MEN ARE USEFUL TO PARTY: MARSHALL BECAUSE HE IS AN UNDER-SPOKEN GENTLEMAN, THE TYPE RESPECTED BY CONSERVATIVE, WEALTHY NATIONAL PARTY VOTERS; MULDOON FOR THE OPPOSITE REASON THAT HE IS A TOUGH, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND VERY EFFECTIVE POLITICAL IN-FIGHTER AND ALSO BECAUSE HE IS

VERY GOOD ON NZ BUDGET AND FISCAL MATTERS AND WORLD
MONETARY MATTERS. IF EITHER STEPS ASIDE COMPLETELY,
AND BOTH SEEM DETERMINED NOT TO, NATIONAL WOULD BE
WEAKENED. RESULT: NATIONAL WILL EITHER CONTINUE TO
SUFFER PROBLEM OF DIVIDED LEADERSHIP (ALTHOUGH MARSHALL
IS TITULAR LEADER) OR LOSE ONE OF ITS TWO BEST LEADERS.

4. CONCLUSIONS:

A. GNZ WILL PROBABLY BE WEAKER AND LESS ABLE
COPE WITH PROBLEMS OF INFLATION (ESPECIALLY ALMOST
UNCONTROLLABLE LABOR WAGE DEMANDS), WHICH WILL MAKE
NEW ZEALAND A LESS EFFECTIVE US ALLY. THIS WEAKNESS
MAY BE INCREASED BY 1975 ELECTIONS.

B. GNZ WILL PROBABLY NOT CHANGE ITS INTER-
NATIONAL POLICY WHICH IS USEFUL TO US UNLESS A WEAKENED
KIRK DECIDES OR IS FORCED TO SEEK STRENGTH FROM THE
LEFT. EMBASSY BELIEVES THIS UNLIKELY AS IT WOULD BE
CONTRARY TO KIRK'S BELIEFS AND HE KNOWS IT WOULD OPEN
A PANDORA'S BOX OF IMPRACTICAL AND HARMFUL POLICIES
WHICH WOULD BE BAD FOR HIM AND FOR NEW ZEALAND.
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